

NEW BRUNSWICK CONSTRUCTION NETWORK

Before You Start

What to know before starting a renovation project

5 Expert Answers from Construction Brain

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What should I look at before renovating a Loyalist-era rowhouse in uptown Saint John — structural concerns and heritage rules?

Loyalist-era rowhouses in Uptown Saint John present unique structural and heritage challenges that require careful assessment before any renovation work begins. These 1780s-1840s buildings are architectural treasures, but their hand-hewn timber frames, stone foundations, and shared party walls demand specialized knowledge.

Your first call should be to the **City of Saint John's Heritage Officer** at Growth & Community Services (506-658-2835) to determine if your property is designated under the Heritage Conservation Act (SNB 2009, c H-4.05). Many Uptown properties fall within heritage conservation areas or hold individual designation, which means exterior alterations — including windows, doors, roofing materials, and siding — require heritage approval before you can obtain building permits. The Trinity Royal Heritage Conservation Area covers much of the historic core, and designated properties have strict guidelines for materials and design.

Structural assessment is critical given the age and construction methods. These buildings typically feature massive hand-hewn timber post-and-beam frames with mortise-and-tenon joinery. The main concerns include foundation settlement (original stone foundations often lack proper footings), timber deterioration from centuries of moisture exposure, and modifications that may have compromised the original structural system. Many rowhouses have had ground floors converted to commercial use, potentially altering critical load-bearing elements.

The **party wall situation** creates unique complications — structural work often affects neighboring properties, requiring coordination and potentially shared costs. These thick masonry walls are load-bearing and any modifications must be engineered. Fire separation between units may not meet current NBC 2020 standards, especially if you're creating additional dwelling units.

Foundation issues are nearly universal in Loyalist-era buildings. Original stone foundations were built directly on bedrock or clay without modern footings, leading to settlement and moisture infiltration. Underpinning may be necessary if you're excavating for basement improvements, but this work is complex in attached buildings where you can't disturb neighboring foundations. Budget \$15,000-\$40,000+ for foundation stabilization depending on scope.

Electrical and mechanical systems require complete assessment. Knob-and-tube wiring is common and must be replaced to meet current codes. The confined spaces and solid masonry construction make running new services challenging and expensive. All electrical work requires permits from NB Power (1-800-615-0522) and inspection by TIS (1-888-659-3222). Plumbing often involves cast iron or galvanized steel that's nearing end of life.

Environmental concerns are significant in buildings this age. Lead paint is virtually guaranteed on all surfaces — proper abatement by certified contractors is required if you're disturbing painted surfaces. Asbestos may be present in later additions or mechanical systems. The confined row house layout can create ventilation challenges that must be addressed during renovation.

Before starting any work, hire a **structural engineer experienced with heritage buildings** to assess the timber frame, foundations, and party walls. Expect to pay \$2,500-\$5,000 for a comprehensive structural assessment, but this investment prevents costly surprises during construction. The engineer's report will be essential for both heritage approval and building permit applications.

Contact the City of Saint John's Development Services team early in your planning process — heritage properties often require additional documentation and longer approval timelines. The combination of heritage restrictions and structural complexity means renovation costs typically run 40-60% higher than comparable work in modern buildings, but the result preserves irreplaceable Maritime architecture.

Q2

We added spray foam insulation and new windows to our drafty Campbellton home — energy bill difference was shocking?

That's fantastic — spray foam and new windows are one of the most effective combinations for older homes in northern New Brunswick! Campbellton's harsh winters and frequent temperature swings make air sealing absolutely critical, and you've tackled the two biggest culprits for heat loss.

Spray foam insulation creates that continuous air barrier that's nearly impossible to achieve with traditional batt insulation, especially in older homes with irregular framing. In Campbellton's climate, where you're dealing with -25°C nights and significant wind exposure, eliminating those air leaks can easily cut heating costs by 30-50%. The foam also prevents the convective loops that rob heat from traditional insulation during those brutal February cold snaps.

New windows complement the spray foam perfectly — older single-pane or early double-pane windows were massive heat drains. Modern triple-pane windows with low-E coatings and argon fill can have R-values of 7-10 compared to R-1 for old single-pane units. That's a game-changer when you're heating against -30°C outdoor temperatures.

Your timing was smart too — **NB Power's Total Home Energy Savings Program** offers rebates for both insulation upgrades and Energy Star windows. If you haven't already claimed these, check if your installations qualify. The

program recognizes that northern New Brunswick homes face some of the province's highest heating demands.

The **National Building Code 2020 Tier 2 energy standards** (mandatory for new construction as of May 2025) actually require the level of performance you've just achieved through renovation. You're ahead of the curve and likely seeing energy bills that rival or beat new construction.

One follow-up consideration: with your home now much tighter, ensure adequate ventilation. Many homeowners in similar situations benefit from adding an HRV (heat recovery ventilator) to maintain indoor air quality while preserving that hard-won energy efficiency. A qualified HVAC contractor can assess whether your current ventilation is adequate for the improved envelope performance.

Your experience perfectly demonstrates why the spray foam + windows combination is so popular with contractors working on older homes throughout northern New Brunswick — the results speak for themselves on the energy bill.

Q3

What should i check for before gutting a 1950s bungalow kitchen in Moncton — is there likely asbestos in the flooring?

Yes, there's a significant chance of asbestos in your 1950s Moncton bungalow kitchen flooring. Vinyl tiles, sheet flooring, and the adhesives used from the 1940s through early 1980s commonly contained asbestos fibers for durability and fire resistance.

Before any demolition work begins, you'll need professional asbestos testing. In New Brunswick, this requires a certified asbestos consultant who will take samples and send them to an accredited lab. Testing typically costs \$400-\$800 for a kitchen, but it's essential — disturbing asbestos-containing materials without proper precautions creates serious health risks and legal liability.

Beyond flooring, your 1950s kitchen likely contains other asbestos materials. Check the 9"x9" vinyl tiles (very common in that era), any textured ceiling finishes, pipe insulation around the hot water lines, and even some older cabinet backing materials. The vermiculite insulation that might be in your walls or attic is another concern — much of it came from the Libby, Montana mine and contains asbestos.

Electrical and plumbing considerations are equally critical. Your home probably has the original 60-amp electrical service with cloth-wrapped wiring that's well past its safe lifespan. Any electrical work requires a licensed contractor (TIS licensing) and an NB Power wiring permit (1-800-615-0522). The original galvanized supply lines and cast iron drains are likely nearing failure — budget \$3,000-\$6,000 for complete kitchen plumbing rough-in by a TIS-licensed plumber.

Don't forget the building permit from the City of Moncton's Planning & Development department (856-4375). Kitchen gut jobs typically require permits for electrical, plumbing, and structural modifications. If you're removing any walls, you'll need to confirm they're not load-bearing — many 1950s bungalows have a central beam running the length of the house.

Your next step should be hiring an asbestos consultant for testing while you're getting quotes from licensed contractors. The testing takes 3-5 business days for results, giving you time to plan the project properly and avoid costly surprises once demolition starts.

Find a Kitchen Renovations Contractor

New Brunswick Construction Network connects you with experienced contractors in the directory:

- [SE Metal Roof ?](#)
- [First united design & construction inc. ?](#)
- [Atlantic Post and Beam Construction Ltd. ?](#)

[Browse all contractors ?](#)

How many quotes should I get before starting a renovation in New Brunswick?

Getting 3-4 detailed quotes is the sweet spot for most New Brunswick renovation projects. This gives you enough comparison points to understand fair market pricing without getting overwhelmed by too many options or delaying your project unnecessarily.

For smaller projects under \$10,000 (like bathroom updates or flooring), two solid quotes from licensed contractors might be sufficient. But for major renovations—kitchen remodels, additions, or whole-home projects—aim for three to four comprehensive quotes. This helps you spot any outliers, whether suspiciously low bids that might cut corners or inflated pricing that doesn't match the local market.

Quality matters more than quantity when choosing who to quote. Focus on getting estimates from contractors who are properly licensed through NB's Technical Inspection Services (TIS) for any electrical or plumbing work, carry current WorkSafeNB coverage (mandatory for employers with 3+ workers), and can provide local references. In New Brunswick's smaller communities, word-of-mouth recommendations carry significant weight—ask neighbors, local building supply stores, or your municipality's building department for contractor suggestions.

Timing your quote requests strategically can save money and improve availability. New Brunswick's construction season is compressed into roughly May through September for exterior work, so contractors are often booked solid during peak summer months. Getting quotes in late winter or early spring for summer projects gives you better selection and potentially better pricing. Interior renovations can happen year-round, but material deliveries to rural areas may face delays during winter storms.

When reviewing quotes, ensure each contractor is pricing the same scope of work and materials. A quote that's significantly lower might exclude permits, disposal fees, or use lower-grade materials. In New Brunswick, permit costs vary—municipalities like Moncton or Fredericton handle their own permits, while rural areas go through Regional Service Commissions. Make sure permit fees and inspection costs are clearly outlined.

Your next step: Create a detailed scope of work document before requesting quotes, including specific materials, finishes, and timeline expectations. This ensures all contractors are bidding on identical work, making comparisons meaningful. Browse verified contractors in our New Brunswick directory to find licensed professionals in your area who can provide detailed, comparable estimates.

Find a General Contractors Contractor

New Brunswick Construction Network connects you with experienced contractors in the directory:

- Lawrence Landscaping ?
- Loves Painting Ltd. ?
- East Bound Roofing ?

[Browse all contractors ?](#)

Q5

Should I get a home inspection before starting renovations on a house I already own?

Absolutely yes — a pre-renovation inspection can save you thousands and prevent major headaches down the road. Even though you already own the home, a thorough inspection before renovations reveals hidden issues that could derail your project timeline and budget.

What You'll Discover

A qualified home inspector will identify structural problems, outdated electrical systems, plumbing issues, and potential hazards that aren't visible during day-to-day living. In New Brunswick's older housing stock — especially those Victorian-era homes in Fredericton's University Avenue area or post-war bungalows throughout Moncton — you might uncover knob-and-tube wiring, asbestos-wrapped pipes, or foundation settling that needs addressing before you start tearing into walls.

The inspection becomes even more critical if you're planning kitchen or bathroom renovations, basement finishing, or any work involving electrical or plumbing systems. Discovering that your 1970s split-level in Riverview has galvanized drain pipes ready to fail is much better learned before you install new flooring than after.

New Brunswick-Specific Concerns

Given our climate and housing patterns, pay special attention to basement moisture issues — extremely common due to our clay soils and high water tables. An inspector can identify foundation problems, inadequate drainage, or signs of seasonal flooding that could affect your renovation plans. If you're in a flood-prone area like parts of Fredericton or the Saint John River valley, this becomes even more important.

For homes built before 1990, request **radon testing** as part of the inspection. New Brunswick has some of Canada's highest radon levels, with roughly 1 in 4 homes exceeding Health Canada's guideline. If you're finishing a basement or doing extensive work, you need to know your radon levels first — mitigation systems cost \$2,500-\$5,000 if needed later.

Professional vs. DIY Assessment

While you might spot obvious issues like a leaky faucet or peeling paint, a licensed home inspector brings specialized knowledge and tools. They'll check electrical panels for code compliance, test GFCI outlets, examine structural components, and identify potential code violations that could complicate permit applications with your municipality or Regional Service Commission.

Your Next Step

Schedule the inspection before finalizing your renovation plans and budget. Expect to pay \$400-\$800 for a comprehensive inspection, depending on your home's size and age. The report will help you prioritize which issues need immediate attention versus what can wait, and it gives you accurate information when discussing your project with contractors from our verified network.

Find a General Contractors Contractor

New Brunswick Construction Network connects you with experienced contractors in the directory:

- [Chim Chimney Stoves & Services Inc. ?](#)
- [Blue Energy Ltd ?](#)
- [Leading Edge Homes Saint John ?](#)

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Disclaimer: This guide is provided for informational purposes only by New Brunswick Construction Network. It does not constitute professional advice. Always consult qualified, licensed contractors and your local building authority before starting any construction or renovation project. Information is current as of April 5, 2026 and may change. Visit newbrunswickconstructionnetwork.com for the latest answers.